/41 cont./

Chapter XI

What Role Do the Piaches Play?

800 91. The old and traditional. 92. Initiation of the piache. 93. The piache's equipment. 94. Illusiogenic substances. 95. Sessions of piachería. 96. Honorariums, diet, not ventriloquism. 97. The other curers. 98. Legendary piaches. 99. Imagination once more. 100. The piaches and our religion. 101. Not worshipers of the devil.

756 91. This question, which was asked me by one of my former mission companions, fits here like a ring on the finger; since, having dealt in the previous chapter with the Indians' illnesses, it is logical to speak now about their curers. Aside from the new ideas that we can get about the piaches, the fact that they are curers is extremely fundamental and real.

[193] Piache is said in the Pemón language pia-san, which is the plural of piai and piachí and from which with a slight variation comes our Castillian word. Literally it means predecessors, ancestors, the trunks or bases of the human [192] genealogical /42/ tree. The word, thus, has a connotative flavor of something old and connected with the traditional. [173] And, in effect, the piaches are the sustainers or maintainers of the small native oral tradition and are its most zealous guardians and those who admonish and frighten them against the innovations or the scorn of the younger generation in matters of beliefs and customs.

92. The piache, in order to be recognized as such, must [824] submit to an initiation. This consists of long fasts and large potions of tisanes, made of the macerated bark of special trees such as the ayú, the pirkavá, and leaves of kumeré and kavai [273] (tobacco), etc. The drink is given them by the teacher or instructor in such a quantity that it is not lethal to them. These dosages produce in them great intestinal disturbances

114 before and subsequent visits by the Venezuelan explorers Cardona and Heny,
101 but none of these men published an account of the discovery, as far as I know.[7] Undoubtedly some unlettered Venezuelans had visited the region even earlier, but the wanderings of such individuals do not result in discovery in any true sense. Wandering Kamarakotos had also discovered Venezuela by that time, but this did not lead to Venezuela's discovering them. The expedition to which I was attached in 1939, as specified below, was the first to devote any attention specifically to the Indians and it may be said that virtually nothing of any particular value has been published about them before the present monograph.

• 173 The Indians themselves have short memories, practically no time sense, and extremely scanty historical legends. Nevertheless, a few scraps of historical information, evidently thoroughly unreliable, were gathered from them. In the last part of the myth of Maichak, published on a later page, they represent themselves as being the descendants or successors of a man named Kamarakoto who lived in Kamarata, their present home, and whose gigantic "petrified remains" still exist there. This myth is the usual answer to any question as to where they came from, and it includes no hint of their ever having resided elsewhere. There is, however, a second and less miraculous legend that is known to fewer members of the tribe and that has more the ring of historic possibility, although I would place no definite reliance on it either. According to this legend the original Kamarakotos were the descendants of an Indian (presumably with his family) who fled from the region of Tumeremo in the days of the conquistadores. Ideas of geography being vague, "the region of Tumeremo" may mean almost anywhere in the area, far to the north and east of Kamarata, between the Caroní, the Cuyuní, and the Sierra Imataca. There were Catalán Capuchin missions in this region and to this extent the legend
[805] curiously agrees with the statement of Fray Ramón Bueno. "In the days of the conquistadores" may mean almost any time more than two generations ago. It was before the time of the father of anyone now living and beyond that dating is of no value. These "original Kamarakotos" are said by the legend later to have been joined by a man from Luepa. The "man" may be taken to represent a whole family or even a general population drift such as is still going on, and "from Luepa," as was noticed also in other connections, means not specifically from that settlement, which had no importance until a mission was recently established there, but simply from the Gran Sabana or even from
[101] farther eastward through the Gran Sabana. The descendants of this man are said to have intermarried with those of "the man from Tumeremo" and the present Kamarakotos are said to be the resultant mixed group. The "ancient" or "real" Kamarakotos, i.e. those said to have come from Tumeremo, are further said to have had a different language, and a few scraps of this are even remembered, as given on a later page.

7 [see footnote on p. 305, category 116 – Analyst]

173 101 [131] Any interpretation of this legend must be labeled conjecture and hardly even scientific inference, let alone fact. Nevertheless, it could mean more or less this: That there was a tribe called Kamarakoto living somewhere north of the Cuyuní and east of the Caroní in colonial times; that some members of this tribe fled before the attacks of other Indians (cf. Ramón Bueno) or from the missionaries and other white invaders (the present Kamarakoto belief; the dislike of the Indians for the missionaries can also be read between the lines of Ramón Bueno) and settled down in or near Kamarata; that they were there absorbed into an Arekuna population already present or one that drifted in from the east, and that the resultant mixed tribe eventually became wholly Arekuna [144] in speech, culture and physique. A weak point is that the "ancient Kamarakotos" must themselves have been physically identical with the Arekunas, because the Kamarakotos are so today and would hardly be if they were mixed with another tribe of different physical character.

173 92 More recent events are usually treated with equal vagueness. The most definite is the memory of a great tribal war, more than two generations ago, between the Kamarakotos and surrounding tribes, particularly the Mwerwan, a tribe said to have lived on the Caroní and now to be extinct. A dispute over fishing rights between normally friendly tribes led to a general and bloody war. There has been no warfare within the last two generations.

173 797 The cacique, Alejo Calcaño, told me that a "bishop" (i.e. a priest or missionary of some sort) visited this region some thirty years ago, in Alejo's life-time, distributed presents, but did not preach or teach, and forthwith disappeared never to be seen again. I have not been able to find any record of such a visit. Other Indians mention brief visits of missionaries (the same, or others?) which they place at anything from a generation to five years ago. The recently established missions of the Alto Caroní have not yet come in contact with the Kamarakotos.

Basis of This Study

101 114 122 The materials for the present study were gathered during several weeks' residence in Kamarata, the valley south of Auyán-tepúi, early in 1939 with the Comisión Exploradora de la Gran Sabana of the Ministerio de Fomento of the Venezuelan Government. I cannot too heartily thank all the officials concerned for their generosity and their splendid co-operation in making this work possible for me, and I wish particularly to mention the Minister of Fomento, Dr. Manuel Egaña, and my companions and the leaders of the expedition, members of the Servicio Técnico de Minería y Geología, Drs. Victor M. 114 Lopez, Santiago Aguerrevere, Carlos Delgado, and Carlos Freeman. Thanks to them and to the excellent equipment and organization of the expedition, I

539 etseruk$_{ɛ}$ maroden maicha^{ʔ}-ya moro^{ʔ}
use. Forthwith Maichak fishy
to use the gourd bottle. Then Maichak emptied (from

tuna anokapətipə to^{ʔ} anumbatupõy$_{ɛ}$
water emptied then gathered.
the river) the water containing fishes and gathered them (the fishes).

mono-p$_{ɛ}$ moro^{ʔ} anumbatup$_{ɛ}$ itetsɛɪon-ya
For a time fish gathered. His brothers-in-law
He continued to gather fish for some time. His brothers-in-law

it$_{ɛ}$tseru putu pura yetsipə teumo-dakarə
his method know(ing) not were his (own) son with
did not know how he did this. Only his son was

leukin yepətipə moro^{ʔ} anumupə
only was fish gathered.
with him when they gathered fish.

Linguistic Affinities

"Ancient Kamarakoto."

*197 ● 173 Several of the better informed Kamarakotos assured me that their speech is not "real Kamarakoto," although it goes by that name among them and all the neighboring tribes, but has replaced an older language which was Kamarakoto, strictly speaking. This "ancient" or "real" Kamarakoto is now extinct. No one can speak it and no one knows much about it except that it was quite [115] unlike the present speech. The combined efforts of most of the older and more intelligent men of the tribe produced five isolated words and one phrase which are claimed to be ancient Kamarakoto, handed down in the tribe from father to son from very remote times. The phrase, "It is dawn, son, get up!" is peculiar, but is consistent with the memory of an ancient language heard in childhood and later forgotten except for a few scraps more indelibly impressed.

These words are as follows:

*192 *197

Translation	"Ancient Kamarakoto"	Modern Kamarakoto	Taurepan	Others
1. Forest	icha	chureta	tu^{ʔ}rita	Chaima (Adam y-uto, y-ucha.

24/ relatives, with inedible fruit, seem more probably to be indigenous to America.
177 In any case whenever bananas appeared they are now so ancient here that they
[173] are an integral and truly native feature in Indian life. The Kamarakotos have no idea that they are not native and no legends of a time when they were not known.[109]

24/ Sugar cane is also an old introduction, although probably not so old as
262 bananas. It is hardly an essential food, but is much enjoyed. Watermelons
177 are known by the Indians to have been introduced recently. They also say that squash and beans are recent, although these are native foods and are known to them by purely Carib names. Perhaps they meant only that the particular plants now growing there are from seeds brought in from elsewhere.

24/ Although corn (i.e. maize) is known and eaten, it is not plentiful and is
262 not really a staple. These are casave and not maize Indians.

The other root plants, Dioscorea, Xanthosoma, and Ipomea are abundant and may be ranked next to casave as staples. The true potato, Solanum, is not known, and this region is lower and warmer than any in which it was cultivated in pre-Columbian times.

24/ Although cacao has been supposed to be native to this general part of South America, none was observed and it appears to be unknown to the Kamarakotos. Other noteworthy omissions of plants that are cultivated by allied tribes, for instance in British Guiana, are the several citrus fruits and the avocado ("aguacate"), Persea. The former are introduced plants that have not yet penetrated this far; the latter is a native plant that, for some unknown reason, is rare in this region where it would, nevertheless, almost surely produce well.

[132] Several useful wild plants, like species of Bromelia, Bixa, and Genipa, are sometimes planted but are not commonly cultivated forms.

Animal Foods.

23/ In distinction from plant foods, practically all animal foods are wild.
262 A solitary pig was once introduced into Kamarata (I do not know from where)
[177] but it is now dead and no others have been introduced. The only domestic ani-
235 mals are dogs, which are not eaten, and chickens, which have recently been
[522] introduced and are not common. At Uruyén, when we were there, all the chickens were roosters — a subject for joking comment by the Indians, who have a keen (if somewhat robust) sense of humor. Some birds, especially small parrots or parakeets and moriche birds, are kept as pets but they are not bred in captivity and are not raised to eat so cannot be called domestic or food animals.

224 The favorite animal food is peccary, especially the larger species called
262 po. inga, and it is the principal goal of the hunter. The other peccary, pakira, is also prized as are the two kinds of deer, waikin and kutsari, the lapa, urana, the acure, akuri, and the tapir, maikuri (see Vocabulary for more exact identification of these animals).†

† [see footnote on p. 319, category 116 - Analyst]
† [see vocabulary on pp. 54-89, category 116 - Analyst]

273 Other varieties are named for their principal ingredient. Among them are:

napuey-yeuku,	from mapueyes.
piricha-yeuku,	from yams.
icha-yeuku,	from sweet potatoes.
anai-yeuku,	from corn.

-yeuku means simply "juice," but all these are understood to be fermented.

Kachiri has a somewhat sour, gaseous, but pleasant taste. It is a mild intoxicant, perhaps about like a heavy beer or light wine, but on festive occasions it is taken in such enormous quantities that the participants finally become as effectively drunk as if they had taken distilled liquor. It has been the general experience of travelers to acquire a taste for this drink, which is refreshing and mild when taken in moderation.

276 [249] The only narcotic known is tobacco, which is used by both sexes and all ages except the most tender.[124] Tobacco, doubtless pre-Columbian throughout this area, is grown at each settlement. The leaves are tied along a bark string and tied in the houses to dry. When anyone wishes to smoke, he takes [177] a leaf or two, rolls a cigar, and smokes it forthwith. The Kamarakotos are familiar with pipes, which they call by the Venezuelan Spanish name, "cachimba," but these are very little used and certainly are a recent innovation. Those that are used are improvised from palm or other soft wood, hollowed out, with a hollow reed inserted in one side. Cigarettes are not normally used and tobacco is not chewed or snuffed. An aqueous infusion of tobacco is used by the piaches (see "Magic and Religion") but not by other persons and not for pleasure.

Household Furnishings

Tools and Weapons.

411 [171] The principal weapons have been sufficiently characterized in dealing with hunting on a previous page. One typical Carib weapon, the wooden war club, was not seen although from its general distribution there is no doubt that it was formerly known to these people. Some may still exist, but there is no current use for them and they are not now manufactured. In legends of tribal [173] warfare, as I heard them, clubs are not mentioned and the fighting is said to have been entirely with bow and arrow. This is unlikely, but at least it reflects the present lack of knowledge or interest in clubs.

412 177 The universal tools are now machetes, axes, knives, and files, all of steel and of foreign make (mostly North American or German). Although not

124 [see footnote on p. 321, category 116 — Analysis]

285 kumara-katna? — large, flat palm -leaf mats used as doors and, occasionally on floors.

The blowgun dart quiver and kapok carrier are also of basketwork, as are fish traps.

285 422 It is obvious that baskets are essential to the Kamarakotos and that their households require and are characterized by a large number of these of many different kinds. A household has 25 to 30 baskets, or even more, of at least ten different sorts.

Clothing and Ornamentation

Adoption of European Dress.

291 177 Most of the members of the central group and a few from outlying places now have some European clothes, but not all of them have and the costume of the tribe at present is curiously miscellaneous. If Father Ramón Bueno's Camaracotos, referred to in the introduction, are really this tribe, they had been clothed to some extent and evidently with some resistance by missionaries by 1800, but even if this is true, it is so probable as to be virtually certain that (European) clothing was completely discarded subsequent to that time. All the Kamarakotos agree that their immediate ancestors wore no European clothing, but it is interesting that most of them place the introduction of such clothing "just before my time," or "when I was a baby." Thus a man probably in his thirties guessed that European clothing was introduced about 30 years ago, and an old man guessed that it was about 60 years ago. The cacique, Alejo Calcaño, [173] gave the latter figure and said that before that the Kamarakotos wore no clothing at all (not even native) and painted themselves bright red all over — a statement that one must consider thoroughly improbable.[127] [437] There is no question that the Kamarakotos became aware of European clothing at least 25 or 30 years ago through their natural tendency to trade and to go on commercial expeditions. Ever since then some such clothing has probably been possessed occasionally by members of the tribe. Even now it cannot be said to be generally adopted or to have replaced native costume. The Angels say that in 1934 only one man in the tribe had trousers and that something less than half of the women were without dresses. Since then the several expeditions have provided them with large quantities of clothing and of cloth so that the supply is now sufficient to clothe most of the central group, but even when we left many of the men from places farthest from Uruyén and some of the women were still in native costume.[128]

The first foreign clothing to be adopted by the men is trousers. The women make for them loose shorts, reaching about to the knees, from trade goods.

127, 128 [see footnotes on p. 322, category 116 - Analysis]

[text continues on p. 48]

461 would trade his labor for goods for his family rather than for himself. Among
465 the Indians themselves the employment of labor is not uncommon and is paid
[479] either by labor in return or by goods, such as baskets or other common objects of trade. For instance one man may definitely employ another (outside his household — those in the household are of course obligated to help freely) to help erect his house and in return will do an equivalent amount of work for the man employed or will give him an equitable amount of food, drink, or articles of trade. This practice contains the germs of definite class differentiation into employees and laborers, but such differentiation has not at all occurred as yet.
[556] Generally speaking, there is no pronounced difference in wealth between different households and no one man is much more likely to be an employer than an employee.

Crime and Punishment.

●173 According to present statements, the ancient penal code of the tribe, if
673 an indefinite and unwritten customary handling of the problem of crime can be
[681] so called, recognized basically only one crime, that of being hopelessly undesirable, and one punishment, death. Judgment as to the undesirability of a
[682] [683] member of the tribe was based on the commission of antisocial actions, among
173 692 which unjustified murder, violation of fishing rights, and habitual thievery
643 were specifically mentioned. A household might take matters into its own
[627] hands, but this was considered undesirable and the regular, one might say the truly legal, procedure was to lay the complaint before the cacique who judged its accuracy and gravity, but apparently without holding anything resembling
[696] a formal hearing or trial. If he condemned the criminal, he assigned the duty of executing him to any members of the tribe, such as the male complainants, and the sentence was carried out without further formality as soon as opportunity presented.

674 At present, the Indians say, crime is so nearly unknown that no regular
[681] system of punishment is required. It is easy to believe that serious crime is
[157] extremely rare as the amity of the Kamarakotos is amazing. Even when they
[273] were violently drunk no quarreling was seen, still less any attempts at physical injury. They are, however, human and it is incredible that no crime ever is
[178] committed. From answers to hypothetical questions as to what would be done if a crime should occur, it is evident that the old code is still considered natural and just and I have no doubt that it would be, and probably is, still applied if
685 occasion arises. Specifically, it was stated that unprovoked murder and serious
[682] violation of fishing rights merit death and that this should be administered un-
[696] der direction of the cacique but might well be undertaken by the injured house-
[627] hold on its own initiative. Theft, on the other hand, is now considered theoretically (and probably also in practice although no specific instance could be

101 101. These particular Arekunas have no tribal name. The Taurepanes, like the Kamarakotos, are also Arekunas but of a more or less definable tribal group within the Arekuna horde.

●173 161 102. According to the legend of an Indian war perhaps 75 to 100 years ago, the tribe was then decimated, but in the following generation or two increased until it was more numerous than now.

551 114 103. One small boy, with a Spanish name, revealed his Indian name to a member of our party with whom he was on particularly close terms, but he immediately regretted it and denied that he had done so. As I did not myself hear the name I do not record it.

551 177 104. As a joke, names of members of our expedition were given to several Indians who had not had Spanish names and these were accepted and used by the Indians themselves.

343 273 105. At a dance we attended, drinkers who had become unconscious were stowed away in the work-house as long as the hammock-supply held out.

342 824 122 106. Most of the expedition's thatching was with Mauritia leaves, but the Indians pointed out to me (quite correctly) that they did not bother to make as good houses for us as for themselves. I also suspect that they were conserving the dwindling supply of easily available Oenocarpus leaves for their own use.

241 [262] 107. For convenience and in accord with English usage, I shall call the plant and its product casave (or cassava), but properly speaking the plant is "yuca" (which of course has nothing to do with the plant called "yucca" in North America) and only the prepared root is "casave." The Kamarakotos call the plant kosɛ́ra, the root kósɛ́, and the prepared bread eke.

[114] 462 108. This is unusual among related tribes and we were not there in the planting season, but the Indians unequivocally informed us that planting is man's work.

[173] [177] 109. As may be seen in Koch-Grünberg, the Taurepanes, at least, have legends which as a whole are pre-Columbian and in which bananas play a role, perhaps as intrusions — but perhaps because they really were known then?

237 [211] 110. In passing, I may mention that the Indians often stick the jawbone of an eaten animal into the sticks in the inside of the roof and leave it there. They maintain that this has no more significance than to remind them of a